



News Release

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Utah 10th Highest In Nation For Bike Deaths **Report Finds Poor Helmet Use Key Factor**

Salt Lake City, UT – A new Utah Department of Health (UDOH) report (*Bicycle Helmet Use in Utah, 1994–2003*) shows only 3 percent of Utah teens wear bicycle helmets, leaving 97 percent of their peers at serious risk of being hurt or killed. In an average year, 940 Utah bicyclists are hit by motor vehicles and 7 are killed, making Utah's bicycle fatality rate the 10th highest in the nation. The majority of crash victims die of head injuries.

UDOH injury prevention specialists have studied helmet use over the last 10 years. While slightly more adults and preschoolers are wearing helmets, Utah youth ages 5–19 continue to leave theirs at home.

“We are very concerned about young cyclists because they are the ones getting into the majority of crashes with motor vehicles,” said Gary Mower, study author and UDOH bicycle safety coordinator. In fact, school-age children and teens are involved in nearly two-thirds of all bicycle/motor vehicle crashes and account for 41 percent of all bicycle deaths.

UDOH data show the following helmet usage rates for 2003:

- 20 percent of elementary school-age bicyclists (up from 3 percent in 1994)
- 5 percent of secondary school-age bicyclists (up from 0.2 percent in 1994)
- 40 percent of adult bicyclists (up from 34 percent in 1994)

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There is overwhelming evidence that helmets reduce the risk of head injury and death in a bicycle crash by 85 percent. The UDOH recommends parents take an active role in making sure their children are protected:

1. Purchase helmets for all children in the household.
2. Set an example by always wearing your own helmet.
3. Encourage children—including teens—to ride with a helmet.
4. Make sure the helmet fits properly, meaning the chin strap should fit snugly and the helmet should be level on the head – not tilted back. If it's tilted the forehead is exposed and the risk of injury goes up.
5. Tell children to use helmets whenever they ride, not just on busy streets or long rides.

“If everyone in Utah wore a helmet on every ride, 920 fewer people would be treated in emergency rooms every year,” said Mower. “And we would save at least \$19 million annually in medical costs.”

For more information on helmets and bicycle safety, or a copy of the *Bicycle Helmet Use in Utah, 10-Year Observational Survey, 1994–2003* report, please call Gary Mower at 801-538-9145. You may also visit UDOH’s web site at www.health.utah.gov/vipp

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